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## **From Theory to Practice: Challenges and Successes in Implementing NEP 2020 Across Kerala's Rural and Urban Educational Institutions**

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### **Abstract**

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a paradigm shift in India's educational framework, emphasizing holistic, skill-based, and multidisciplinary learning. Kerala, known for its high literacy rate and robust education system, presents a unique case for analyzing the successes and challenges of NEP implementation. This article critically examines the policy's execution across urban and rural educational institutions in Kerala, highlighting its impact, obstacles, and the way forward.

### **Introduction**

Kerala has consistently been at the forefront of educational development in India. With a literacy rate of 96.2% (as per the 2021 Census), the state provides an ideal environment for implementing progressive reforms like NEP 2020. However, the implementation of NEP 2020 has presented contrasting outcomes across urban and rural educational landscapes. While urban institutions have swiftly adapted to policy changes, rural schools and colleges face infrastructural and digital accessibility challenges.

### **Successes in Urban and Rural Institutions**

#### **1. Shift to Multidisciplinary Learning**

NEP 2020 emphasizes flexibility in curriculum and a multidisciplinary approach. Urban institutions in Kerala, particularly in cities like Thiruvananthapuram, Kochi, and Kozhikode, have successfully adopted four-year undergraduate programs (FYUP), skill-based courses, and interdisciplinary research initiatives. Many higher education institutions have introduced coding, artificial intelligence (AI), and vocational training to align with global education standards.

In rural areas, schools are gradually incorporating vocational subjects like agriculture, fisheries, and handicrafts, which cater to local economies. The integration of local knowledge into the curriculum has strengthened community-based learning.



## **2. Strengthening Digital Education**

Kerala's KITE-VICTERS initiative has played a crucial role in digital education, making it easier for urban schools to transition to hybrid and online learning models. Universities like Kerala University and Mahatma Gandhi University have introduced massive open online courses (MOOCs) and online certification programs to expand access to quality education. In rural settings, the Hi-Tech School Project has provided digital classrooms, but poor internet connectivity and limited access to personal digital devices remain barriers to fully utilizing online education platforms.

## **3. Language and Multilingual Learning**

NEP promotes education in the mother tongue in early schooling years. Kerala has successfully implemented bilingual teaching (Malayalam & English) in primary education, ensuring conceptual clarity among students. However, the three-language policy (introducing Hindi or Sanskrit) has faced resistance due to Kerala's preference for a two-language system (Malayalam and English).

## **4. Teacher Training and Professional Development**

NEP 2020 focuses on teacher capacity building through continuous professional development (CPD) programs. Kerala has taken proactive steps by introducing competency-based training, digital pedagogy workshops, and experiential learning models. Urban schools have better access to teacher training programs, while rural educators often struggle with training opportunities and exposure to new teaching methodologies.

### **Challenges in Implementing NEP 2020 in Kerala**

#### **1. Digital Divide Between Urban and Rural Areas**

Despite Kerala's advancements in e-learning infrastructure, many rural students lack internet access and digital devices, creating a disparity in online learning opportunities. This issue became evident during the COVID-19 pandemic when students in remote areas faced difficulties in attending virtual classes.

#### **2. Resistance to Structural Changes in Higher Education**

The shift to FYUP and multidisciplinary institutions has faced criticism from certain academic groups in Kerala. The state's traditional three-year degree system is well-established, and some educators and students have reservations about the new credit-based structure and its long-term impact.

#### **3. Administrative and Policy Implementation Gaps**

While urban institutions have adapted faster, many rural schools and colleges lack proper guidance, funding, and administrative clarity regarding NEP implementation. School management



committees and governing bodies need better coordination and awareness programs to ensure smooth policy execution.

#### **4. Aligning Kerala's Existing Educational Framework with NEP 2020**

Kerala already has a strong state education policy, and integrating NEP reforms without disrupting existing successful models is a challenge. The state government has taken a cautious approach, selectively implementing \*\*NEP provisions while maintaining its unique educational strengths.

#### **Recommendations and the Way Forward**

**1. Bridging the Digital Gap:** The government should ensure universal access to digital devices and internet connectivity in rural areas by expanding Wi-Fi infrastructure and providing subsidized digital tools.

**2. Enhancing Teacher Training in Rural Areas:** Establishing rural teacher training hubs and conducting regular online professional development programs can improve the quality of education in remote regions.

**3. Adapting NEP Flexibly to Kerala's Education Model:** The state must continue its hybrid approach, incorporating NEP's strengths while maintaining Kerala's successful public education framework.

**4. Strengthening Vocational and Skill-Based Education:** Expanding practical skill courses in rural schools can reduce dropout rates and improve employability among students.

**5. Greater Stakeholder Involvement:** Collaboration between government bodies, educators, parents, and students is crucial for overcoming policy resistance and improving implementation strategies.

#### **Conclusion**

The implementation of NEP 2020 in Kerala presents a dynamic interplay of progress and challenges. While urban institutions have successfully integrated digital learning, multidisciplinary education, and skill-based courses, rural institutions still struggle with digital access, training, and policy adaptation. Addressing these disparities through inclusive policymaking, improved infrastructure, and localized implementation strategies will be essential in ensuring that NEP 2020 fulfills its promise of equitable, holistic, and quality education for all students in Kerala.